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Characteristics of educational policies from the perspective of interculturality

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Abstract

The European Council's Recommendation relating to teacher training in education for intercultural understanding, highlights the fact that the purpose of international education, which is above intercultural education, is to develop the sense of social responsibility and solidarity with disadvantaged groups and induce respect for the principle of equality in daily behaviour. The essence of the intercultural education system is represented by *ensuring authentic cultural interactions, free from the constraints of a competitive axiology*. We refer, in this respect, to *the promotion through education of a continuum of value, of connecting bridges between different cultures, ethnicities, religions or races which are in contact*.

Key words: intercultural education, group pedagogy, socio-educational adaptation, intercultural skills.

Zusammenfassung

Die Empfehlung des Europäischen Rat für die Bildung der Lehrkräfte betont dass die Lehrkräfte für die Begreifung der Interkulturalität vorbereitet sein sollen. Der Zweck der internationalen Erziehung ist die soziale Verantwortlichkeit und die Solidarität mit den benachteiligten Gruppen zu verbessern. Das bedeutet dass man das Prinzip der Gleichberechtigung des taglichen verhalten respektieren muss. Sehr wichtig ist auch die Beforderung der Erziehungswert und eine Verbindung zwischen Kulturen, Volker, Religionen oder Rassen zu entwickeln.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Interkulturalitaterziehung, Interkulturalitatpedagogie, Gruppenpedagogie, Sozialeinfugung und Erziehungsadaptierung

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I. European interests in intercultural education

Intercultural education corresponds to the third pillar of education: learning to live with others. The International Commission for the 21st century education focused on that component of education as being vital in developing a harmonious society. This pillar refers to learning to live with others, "*through the development of the knowledge of others, their history, their traditions and spirituality*". (Delors, J.,1996:18)

Present European societies, ethnically and culturally plural, but also from the perspective of their identities and interests, imperatively require that future generations in the socialization process acquire basic skills that will enable a peaceful coexistence with groups that claim difference, whether ethnical, cultural, of identity or of interests.

European Union's concern about interculturality marks a paradigm shift, in which the positive character of integration is unequivocally recognized, as well as the need of an intercultural dialogue in education, and the initial and continuous training of teachers in the field of interculturality. This is no longer confined to groups perceived as minorities, but extends to all students, both to their majority and minority. By affirming the centrality of education in intercultural dialogue, the emphasis is laid on the responsibility of governments to implement national policy measures in education, meant to promote intercultural dialogue. These involve both the initial and the continuous training of teachers in the field of interculturality and the creation of pedagogical media for intercultural education.

The European Council's Recommendation, 2004 (10), p. 9-10, relating to teacher training in education for intercultural understanding, highlights the fact that the purpose of international education, which is above intercultural education, is to develop the sense of social responsibility and solidarity with disadvantaged groups and induce respect for the principle of equality in daily behaviour. And, particularly, intercultural education allows structuring an open cultural identity, having as goals: guiding young people to assimilate a culture from an anthropological perspective; understanding another person's point of view by relativist positioning, legitimating of cultural identity, preventing sacredness; ensuring respect for differences, but within systems of mutual attitudes.

At school level, the objectives of intercultural education target:

- *the preservation and protection of cultural diversity* (The school, as an instance of transmission of values will focus on the plurality of cultures);

- *the formation of intercultural skills of citizens* (the dynamic and continuous characteristic of the formation process of intercultural behaviours and attitudes, a process that does not end at school, but should continue and refine during the entire lifetime, should be stressed); conducted in schools, intercultural education aims all students, native or immigrant, aiming to sensitize them to respect diversity, tolerance and solidarity. In this respect, Constantin Cucos, 2001, exemplifies the following intercultural behaviours: availability towards knowing, acceptance of otherness from a neutral perspective, the ability to question and reformulate own rules. The socio-cultural referential system determines our behaviour, and by recognizing the relativity of this system the individual is able to improve it and thus adapt easier; the ability to acquire larger identities (European citizen, citizen of the world) developing a new type of loyalty, which integrates the national, regional, professional, social identities.

By encouraging intercultural attitude, the path towards dialogue and communication among cultural groups is opened, with beneficial consequences upon understanding among them. Cultivating values such as respect for each other, tolerance of diversity, complementarity of values, the school is able to exploit the potential richness of multiculturalism without canceling the identity of any culture.(Cucos, C., p.177-178)

II.Socio-educational adaptation and group pedagogy, possible openings of interculturality

In modern education we are experiencing a paradigm shift, meaning *the adaptation of the educational environment to the requirements of the student*. Respecting diversity and individuality is one of the guiding principles of education today in all education systems. Problems arising at the level of decision makers in education increasingly determine the promoting of student-centred learning, namely the need to adapt school to the individual and group needs, respecting both diversity and interculturality in education.

Letitia Trif, 2008, suggests the analysis of the term adaptation in the light of a *series of efficient / optimal design actions for socio-affective integration strategies in the community and of a differentiated and personalized curriculum*.

In this respect, we shall approach adaptation mainly from a social and pedagogical-educational perspective, using the term *socio-educational adaptation*.

- ✓ The first social dimension refers to the adaptation of the students to the educational environment/class group as a prerequisite for their social integration.
- ✓ Educational adaptation emphasises the design of a differentiated/personalized curriculum as a condition for the formation of those skills which favour integration.

In essence, the analysis of the two dimensions reveals the following characteristics of socio-educational adaptation:

- ❑ The relation of inter-dependence and inter- conditioning between the individual and the socio-educational environment;
- ❑ Facilitates integration through professional and social insertion;
- ❑ Requires the design of a differentiated and personalized curriculum;
- ❑ Determines the formation of scientific, self-awareness, communication and inter-relation skills in students. (Trif, L., 2007:135-137)

We consider important to indicate that the sense of socio-educational adaptation targets a complementarity, a balance, at the same time, between educational paradigms that promote the adaptation of the school to the demands of students and the student's possibility to socio-educationally adapt.

Contemporary educational paradigms regarding *the alignment of the school to the student's requirements and training opportunities* form the argument to develop the understanding of *socio-educational adaptation* in terms of correlation with the new regulations and policies of education systems and contemporary curriculum policies. In this sense, we identify *interactive training in terms of forming attitudes of cooperation, obedience, tolerance, conflict avoidance, by taking team decisions*.

Muşata Bocos, 2002, analyses the characteristics of **group pedagogy** starting from the two fundamental dimensions: cognitive behaviours and social behaviours which mutually interact and condition each other in solving tasks in the team. The specific stages in group pedagogy are:

- Didactic project stage – which consists of analysing the psychological resources of the group members, the intelligence level, selecting context-adequate educational activities, identifying the efficient way of guiding students, etc;

- Actual implementation of the tasks stage, in which the focus is on the student's activity. We note that group activity involves, beyond the moments of collective reflection, thinking and work – “learning how to live with others” – also moments of individual reflection, thinking and work – “learning to be”.

In group pedagogy, by verbal and intellectual exchanges, a true community of learning, research, interests and education is formed, in which:

- Students work in groups to achieve a common goal, whose accomplishment depends on each one's personal contribution;
- The class of students has a specific code and own “luggage”, thus constituting itself as a specific place where students co-develop new acquisitions and socialising rules;
- Environment based on mutual trust and objectivity;
- Students feel respected, valued, useful as individuals and responsible in their activity;
- There is an equality of rights which allows the students to exert their free-will and carefully examine reality and the situations they encounter;
- Regardless of their training level, students acquire self-confidence;
- Almost complete participation of the students in taking decisions;
- The group's performance are due to the individual contributions of its members, while individual performances may be highlighted only if the performances of the group as a whole are good;
- The common result of the entire group's activity depends not only on the quality of each student's work, but also on their ability to cooperate and exercise self-control; thus, through collaboration activities, the role of learning motivation, self-control and mutual control increases;
- A positive inter-dependence is formed among the members of the group, because one student's performance depends on the contributions and performances of all the others in the group, by reciprocal and systematic influence. (Bocoş, M., 2002:215).

III.Strategies and tools for intercultural pedagogy

Lucia Ciolan, 2000, identifies in the structure of intercultural education several inter-correlated dimensions: intercultural movement, intercultural engagement, intercultural formative-instructive process, and last but not least, intercultural curriculum.

Thus, the intercultural curriculum, as dimension of intercultural education, supposes the capitalization, through formative-instructive contents, of values, history and contribution of different cultural, religious, ethnic or racial communities to the making and development of a society and culture of adoption.

Referring to these issues, James Bank, (quoted by Moscovici, S., 1998), distinguishes four levels of structuring intercultural curriculum:

- discreetly attaching different cultural elements, fictional models (novel or story characters) and references to cultural events;

- Systematic enrichment of contents, maintaining the original curriculum structure, by adding new sequences of content, new concepts, themes or theoretical perspectives specific to other cultures;

- Transforming curriculum structure to allow students adequate analysis of concepts, events, or themes from the perspective of various cultural communities;

- Action approach of conflictual or potentially conflictual situations, students proposing options for solving acute socio-cultural issues related to cultural, ethnic, racial or religious diversity, or acting towards facilitating the settlement of these problems. (Ciolan, L., 2000:21-26)

The directory of strategies and resources available for an intercultural pedagogy presented by Cohan, L., Bernstein, C., 1986, is very varied, including such items as:

- Enrichment of lessons with data and information about the culture and history of various communities that constitute the present of a particular society, with emphasis on their convergence dimensions;

- Using comparisons in describing and analysing various cultures, ethnicities and religions, enabling the students' knowledge and appreciation of the similarities and differences found;

- Presentation of ethnic, racial or religious identity of outstanding personalities from the national or universal culture;

- Facilitating positive interpersonal relationships between students and other people of different ethnicity, race or religion;
- Encouraging students to ask questions about the problem of relations between different cultures and develop their ability to understand and correctly interpret possible divergences between them;
- Educational capitalization of the local community's resources (undertaking studies on the contribution of various personalities to the history and development of that particular community);
- Helping students understand the genesis of stereotypes and cultivation of personal pride in belonging to a certain culture, concurrently with the development of respect for other cultures;
- Expanding the students' knowledge regarding the history, culture and values of minorities by presenting films or documentaries, works of art or literary works which present intercultural instructive-formative aspects.

IV. Conclusion

The essence of the intercultural education system is represented by *ensuring authentic cultural interactions, free from the constraints of a competitive axiology*. We refer, in this respect, to *the promotion through education of a continuum of value, of connecting bridges between different cultures, ethnicities, religions or races which are in contact*.

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